

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9445

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 3743

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SK, IN, NP

SUBJECT: NEPALESE REACTION TO SIKKIM EVENTS

1. ALTHOUGH STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH LAST WEEK RESULTED IN ARRESTS OF AT LEAST 14 STUDENTS AND SOME PROPERTY DAMAGE TO INDIAN OWNED SHOPS HAS NOW ABATED, ISSUE OF SIKKIM CONTINUES TO FESTER.

2. FONMIN KARKI WAS FORCED TO MAKE ANOTHER STATEMENT IN NATIONAL PANCHAYAT SEPTEMBER 10 IN RESPONSE TO APPARENT CRITICISM THAT HIS ASSURANCES TO INDIAN AMBASSADOR RASGOTRA HAD GONE TOO FAR. KARKI CHARGED THAT REPORTS OF THAT MEETING CARRIED IN INDIAN PRESS WERE MISLEADING AND SAID THAT "ON SUCH A MATTER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE WE ARE ALL UNITED." KARKI SAID THAT IT WAS ONLY NATURAL TO REGRET CERTAIN "UNDESIRABLE INCIDENTS THAT OCCURRED IN THE COURSE OF LAST WEEK'S DEMONSTRATIONS AND WARNED THAT HMG WOULD TAKE "SEVERE ACTION" AGAINST ACTIONS BY ONE ETHNIC COMMUNITY AGAINST ANOTHER IN COUNTRY. AS FOR REPORTED MALTREATMENT OF NEPALIS LIVING IN INDIA, "HMG HAS NO INFORMATION ABOUT IT." IN CONCLUSION KARKI EXPRESSED HIS "PERSONAL CONFIDENCE" THAT "TRADITIONAL INDIAN-NEPALI FRIEND-
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SHIP WOULD NOT BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY RECENT EVENTS."

3. COMMENT: NOT ALL NEPALIS WE HAVE TALKED TO SHARE KARKI'S CONFIDENCE ON THE EFFECT SIKKIM WILL HAVE OVER THE SHORT HAUL ON BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH INDIA. FORMER PRIME MINISTER BISTA, WHO HIMSELF EXPERIENCED CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM FROM DELHI WHEN HE ORDERED INDIAN PATROLS AND CHECKPOSTS TO BE DISBANDED, TOLD EMBOFF SEPTEMBER 10 THAT PROTEST NOTES DELIVERED TO MFA WERE "STRONGLY WORDED, ALMOST INSULTING." ALTHOUGH BISTA HAS HIS OWN MOTIVES FOR SAYING SO, HE REMARKED THAT PRESENT SITUATION VIS-A-VIS INDIA WAS "NEARLY AS DIFFICULT AS ISENCOUNTERED IN EARLY SIXTIES." HE FEARED THAT DELHI ("WITH ITS USUAL INEPTNESS") MIGHT OVERREACT BY THREATS. AS EXAMPLES OF THIS POSSIBILITY BISTA CITED REPORTS IN INDIAN PRESS OF MURDER OF INDIAN WORKER IN TERAJ AND OF DECISION CONTEMPLATED BY BIHAR TO CANCEL PORTION OF KOSI RIVER CANAL SLATED TO GO THROUGH NEPAL. SUCH TACTICS, HE CONCLUDED, CAN NOT WIN FRIENDS HERE AND MAKES POSITION OF PRO-INDIAN FORCES THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT.

4. BISTA'S REACTION, HOWEVER, IS NOT TYPICAL. MORE DISPASSIONATE OBSERVERS ARE QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT NEPAL CANNOT HOPE TO WIN IN ANY KIND OF A SHOWDOWN WITH DELHI. THEY NOTE THAT STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH WERE, ON THE WHOLE, QUITE MILD, WERE LEAST NEPAL COULD DO TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR NEPALESE MAJORITY IN SIKKIM WHICH, IN THEIR VIEW, REMAINS OPPOSED TO ASSOCIATION WITH INDIA. THEIR GENERAL ASSESSMENT IS THAT STORM WILL BLOW OVER WITHOUT LASTING EFFECT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS. THUS, MINISTER FOR PANCHAYAT AFFAIRS DAMODAR S.J.B. RANA TOLD AMBASSADOR HE DID NOT THINK SIKKIM AFFAIRS WOULD HAVE LONG-RANGE IMPLICATIONS FOR INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT "WE HAVE MADE OUR POSITION VERY CLEAR" AND THAT "WE COULD DO NO LESS IN VIEW OF THE PREDOMINANTLY NEPALESE ORIGIN OF THE SIKKIMESE POPULATION."

5. OUR OWN ASSESSMENT IS IN GENERAL ACCORD WITH THE VIEW SUMMARIZED IN PARA 4. NEPALESE OFFICIALS BY AND LARGE HAVE A VERY REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE NECESSITY IN TERMS OF NEPALESE NATIONAL INTEREST OF EQUABLE RELATIONS WITH INDIA AND CONSIDER THAT NEPAL CANNOT EMERGE THE WINNER FROM A SERIOUS CONFRONTATION. NOW THAT CHINA HAS WEIGHED IN WITH

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ANOTHER, STRONGER PRESS STATEMENT ON SIKKIM, SOMENEPALIS MAY FEEL THAT NEPAL HAS DONE ITS PART AND CAN LET OTHERS CARRY BALL. MUCH DEPENDS, HOWEVER, ON INDIAN REACTION. WE HAVE READ STATEMENTS IN INDIAN PRESS PRESUMABLY COMING FROM INDIAN EMBASSY HERE WHICH ARE HARDLY DESIGNED TO BE CONCILIATORY. REPORTED FLIGHT OF KHAMPA BAND INTO INDIA, THREAT TO DIVERT KOSI CANAL, AND RUMORS OF ATTACKS ON NEPALIS IN BIHAR AND CALCUTTA ALL CONTRIBUTE TO A GENERAL FEELING OF NEPALESE

UNEASINESS ON WHAT DELHI MAY BE UP TO.
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